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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: A GLANCE AT THE STATE OF WILDLIFE AND FORESTRY IN NIGERIA

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - DO NOT DISTRIBUTE OUTSIDE USG.

**¶1. (U) Summary:** ESTHOFF and visiting REO met with key Nigerian federal officials responsible for wildlife and forest conservation and management November 26-29. Ownership of the major Nigerian wildlife and forestry reserves transferred from the federal government to the states starting in 2000 without a coherent conservation policy and adequate legal framework in place and technical capacity for the states to manage and use these national treasures in a sustainable manner. From thereon, the state of forestry and wildlife has been on a decline, leading to increased poaching and illegal logging, according to the officials. In 2005 wildlife inspectors were removed from Nigerian airports, seaports, and border checkpoints under a reorganization move. Since then, there have been no clear mechanisms to prevent trafficking in wildlife and wildlife parts and products from the country. For this reason, Nigeria was suspended two years ago from the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) has been working with the Federal Government of Nigeria and concerned states to promote conservation and plans to submit grant proposals under the Department Economic Support Fund to promote conservation in Yankari and Calabar national parks. End Summary.

Conservation not a Priority

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**¶2. (SBU)** Mr. John Mashelbwale, Assistant Director for the Nigeria Wildlife Services and CITES Officer for monitoring the illegal killing of elephants (MIKE), said that Nigerian wildlife conservation efforts are fraught with problems ranging from the lack of adequate resources to lack of enforcement authority over state-owned game reserves and forests. According to Mashelbwale, the downward slide started in 2000 when, as part of the GON's decentralization program, ownership of the national parks transferred from the federal government to the states, even though the latter have little or no capacity in wildlife and forestry conservation and management. Most states see the reserves primarily as a source of income (from tourism) and do very little to advance conservation. They lack comprehensive laws, wildlife and forestry management plans, qualified personnel, and resources to promote conservation and sustainable ecotourism. The result, according to Mashelbwale, has been a deteriorating wildlife habitat, increased poaching and illegal trafficking of wildlife and wildlife parts outside of the country.

Nigeria Suspended from CITES

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**¶3. (SBU)** Nigeria was suspended from the CITES convention in 2005 for failure to make sufficient progress in cracking down on illicit trade in endangered wildlife. Wildlife officials stated that illicit trade in wildlife is thriving because of the lack of institutional mechanisms to prevent illegal hunting and trade.

Since 2005, wildlife inspectors have not been posted at Nigeria's airports, seaports and international border crossings. According to Mashelbwale, there has been some political wrangling to reinstate the wildlife inspectors; however, currently there is no funding to do that. Wildlife officials identified Hajj and Umra chartered flights as convenient conduits for trafficking wildlife, particularly parrots and ivory, out of the country. Trafficking overland is also rampant, according to these officials. They said that fuel tankers are used to smuggle hides and skins and ivory to and from Nigeria to neighboring Central African Republic, Chad, Cameroon, and Gabon.

#### Yankari National Park

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**¶4. (U)** Yankari National Park, about 300 kilometers northeast of the capital Abuja, is Nigeria's most famous game park and home to one of the few viable elephant populations in West Africa. The park's ownership was transferred to Bauchi State in 2006, after the Federal Government lost a court battle to prevent the transfer. The park does not have a wildlife management plan, professional workforce, or adequate equipment (e.g., patrol cars and other game warden tools) to fight poaching and promote ecotourism. Federal conservation officials stated that poaching is on the rise and expressed apprehension about the ongoing viability of the colony without improved game management and conservation efforts.

**¶5. (SBU)** Highlighting the deteriorating situation, Mr. Jarafu Mamza, Director of Nigeria's National Park Service stated that the last significant recovery of 446 pieces of elephant ivory took place in 1996, despite recent indications that the elephant population in the country is dwindling. According to the director, Sambiza Forest

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Reserve in Borno State, northeast Nigeria, lost its elephant population of 200 to 300 in the 1990s due to insufficient attention to conservation and insistent poaching. He wants to work with Bauchi State to prevent the same fate befalling the elephant population in Yankari. To combat trafficking, the Nigerian Park Service, in collaboration with Interpol's Working Group on Wildlife Crime, is establishing a Wildlife Crime Intelligence Unit. The unit is expected to be up and running in the New Year and is expected to enhance the agency's ability to combat trafficking.

#### Nigeria's Forests under Threat

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**¶6. (SBU)** Mrs. Ann Ata, Director of the Nigerian Forest Service, described Nigeria's forest reserves as badly managed and under constant threat from deforestation, desertification, and illegal logging. She said that Nigeria is losing its forests at the rate of 3.5% per year, the highest in Africa primarily due to harvesting of firewood and drought. She added that Nigeria did its last forest survey in 1995 and desperately needs to conduct a new one, which is essential to develop and implement an effective conservation strategy. Like the game reserves, Nigeria's forest reserves are owned and managed by the states; however, most of them have no forest management plan, laws, or qualified personnel to manage and conserve their forests. According to the director, although state governments give out logging concessions and generate revenue they rarely use the income to reinvest in their forests. Cross River State in the south is the only one that has laws and is doing a better job in managing its forest reserves, according to the director.

#### Comment

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**¶8. (U)** The state of Nigeria's wildlife and forestry is under threat from natural and manmade causes. Nigeria's decentralization of ownership of national reserves to the states can have some advantages; however, without proper local capacity to effectively protect and manage them the long term viability and sustainability of these treasures is in serious jeopardy. The states need to strike the right sustainable balance between income generation and conservation and need to coordinate with their national counterparts

to promote a coherent policy. The WCS has been working with the Federal Government of Nigeria and concerned states to promote conservation in Calabar and Yankari reserves. Post and the Regional Environmental Office have initiated discussions with concerned state, federal and WCS representatives to develop proposals for consideration under Department Economic Support Fund for elephant conservation in Yankari and great apes in Calabar. End Comment).  
¶9. This cable has been coordinated with Consulate Lagos.

SANDERS